

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Essay Contest – 2005

First Prize: Lena Cardoso, Lake Washington Girl's Middle School

A Passionate Spirit

Many people associate the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. with his "I Have a Dream" speech given on August 29, 1963. Dr. King provided the culminating speech after the historic March on Washington where approximately 250,000 people gathered in demonstration of the inequalities in justice for blacks versus white Americans. His memorable speech campaigned for an end to judgments based on color of skin and for freedom for all people (Darby 69-70). Dr. King's legacy extends beyond this one speech.

My generation studies the life of Dr. King each year while studying the history of civil rights. Since he died before I was born, my generation's knowledge of his accomplishments come from historical interpretations provided by teachers, parents, chapters in books, and other articles we read. While Dr. King accomplished many things that benefited black Americans, many other injustices among people still exist today such as plain old hatred, lack of equal opportunity employment, and religious prejudice, for example. Americans continue to have talks about these issues and the meaning of freedom; perhaps Dr. King's legacy to us all comes from his inspiration, motivation, and passionate voice that allow us to continue debating and resolving these issues.

Dr. King, along with many others, tried to make a difference. I believe his fame resulted from his passionate spirit combined with his brilliant public speaking skills. One of my favorite quotes by Dr. King comes from his Nobel Prize acceptance speech given on December 10, 1964:

"I refuse to accept the view that mankind is so tragically bound to the starless midnight of racism and war that the bright daybreak of peace and brotherhood can never become a reality... I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word." (MLK Online 1).

Dr. King spoke these words during a time when passion, drive, and hope were desperately needed to bring justice and equality to America. His use of words makes this quote speak to you. Look at the way he compares war and racism to a starless midnight, and peace and brotherhood to a bright daybreak. The metaphors create vivid images that draw you in; it makes me listen and gets me to think. The words "unarmed truth" remind me of truth without a catch and "unconditional love" makes me wonder what the world could be like if everyone just respected one another and each other's beliefs.

Hatred, present in many ways, still happens in our everyday world. Although we have come a long way in America through interpretation of our Constitution and through the passing of various laws, problems still exist in this country and in others. People

worldwide still feel the effects of racism, lack of religious freedom, and gender persecution, to name a few. In order to make things better, people need to open the lines of communication and be willing to recognize and discuss these injustices. As individuals, each person needs to be the best that they can be, bringing passion and spirit to the world like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. did.

The process of trying to overcome injustices will unite the common good. Solutions to every problem will not happen overnight, but progress can be made by advancing one step at a time. I can try and help by inspiring one person, who in turn will hopefully inspire someone else, creating a chain affect until the passion and spirit touches many people. We have so many freedoms to be proud of in this country, although if you look at the big picture, there is room for improvement.

The world has changed with technological advancements and many countries are no longer isolated. Due to this globalization, problems found in one country can more directly affect other countries. As Americans, we need to consider injustices in our own country, as well as those found worldwide. The large world seems smaller in this day and age.

United for the common good benefits everyone. While the definition of "common good" will probably vary depending on whom you talk to and where you live, I think that most people will agree that "common good" defines something that is not just for the rich, or just the poor. Not just for whites, or just for blacks. Not just for men, or just for women. Not just for Americans, or just Europeans. The people of the world need to unite for the good of everyone. Hopefully, we can come one step closer by remembering a man with a passionate spirit.

Works Cited

Darby, Jean. Martin Luther King Jr. Lerner Publications Company, Minneapolis, Minnesota: 2005.
"Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech" 2005. MLK Online. 30 Nov. 2005,
www.mlkonline.net/acceptance.html.